Every angel on Heaven and Earth and Hell feels it the moment Lucifer is released.

There is a bright, too bright pulsing of power as the seals fall away at last, and then there is nothing than can be done to seal Lucifer back in.

The End, as they say, is Nigh.

For Lucifer, the moment the last seal broke was the moment the walls of his prison vanished. He had already been standing, eager to go (and again afraid, but that was only the reaction of an animal who had become long used to four walls and nothing else) and fly freely once again.

The walls vanished. Air cracked with the released power and the rushing to fill the voids the walls had left behind. Lucifer beat his mighty wings and ascended, alone as he left the cold and the dark behind.

The great plains of Hell opened before him, and its vast oceans parted in displays of impossible physics and demons everywhere scrambled out of his way, and then to turn and stare at the most beautiful creature they would ever see passed them by.

For Lucifer had changed in so many ways, imprisoned in ice below, but the glory of his visage had not faded, even if it was different from the bright fire it had once been.

While the demons stared in awe and fear as their creator passed, the Fallen angels instead began to rouse themselves, emerging from their respective domains and long rests to follow Lucifer to the level of Hell closest to Earth.

(It did not matter that some hated Lucifer, or that some would sooner see him dead than freed, as none of them could act against him today. Not with the pulse of power his freedom caused still ringing in their ears, and not when they could see the terribly cold strength within him.)

Lucifer stood at the farthest reaches of Hell and waited as his Fallen angels amassed before him, and he waited with wings outstretched, simply feeling the brush of heat against his form once again, but even as he was warmed it would not sink in, and the cold in his bones and body would not lift. He had been in the cold and dark for too long, after all.

It wasn't long before every angel who had raised their swords for him was assembled before him.

It wasn't long before he had finished his thoughts and knew what to tell them all.

What Lucifer told every Fallen angel that day was this:

"Those of you who despise me for failing you, those of you who love me

regardless, those of you who are still loyal: I am sorry that it has come to this. I will end this entire debacle once and for all, that I promise you."

And then with a sound like that of ice breaking, and a great rushing of air, Lucifer worked a spell that he had been figuring out how to work for years, and before any of the angels before him realized what he was doing, cold wrapped them all up and held them still, so still that when Lucifer beat his wings once and began to ascend to earth, the gusts of air tore them apart.

He regretted the act, and if he could have wept for the loss he would have, but he had learned long ago that he could no longer produce tears while he was as cold as he was.

If he had been detained and asked why he had done it, had slain some of his best allies, he would have answered that he was doing what he was supposed to do: end it all, wipe the slate clean and attempt to start everything over.

And like that Lucifer left Hell and flew for Earth, to find his vessel and do as he had promised to do.

Gabriel wants to see Lucifer. Gabriel wants to find him, the moment he feels Lucifer's release.

He denies this urge as firmly as he can, and does his Trickster routine across three states before he gives in enough to go see Crowley. Even if they aren't having an affair any more, Gabriel can visit for business, and he wants something from Crowley.

Gabriel rings the doorbell and rocks on his heels, waiting for it to open this time. He's being polite, the perfect guest so that Crowley will have no excuse to toss him out on his ear. He won't try to kiss or touch Crowley in inappropriate places, even.

The door opens after a long minute, and there is Crowley standing before him.

"Oh." Crowley says. "What do you want?"

"Information," Gabriel says, and he shows the palms of his hands. "Just some information, in exchange for whatever would be fair enough."

Crowley gives him an appraising look. "What do you want to know?"

"Two locations. Where Lucifer is, and where his vessel is." Gabriel holds up two fingers. He watches as Crowley narrows his eyes and regards him suspiciously.

"How do you know about that remarkable bit of information about angels?" Crowley asks, and Gabriel shows the palms of his hands again. "And what are you going to do with their locations?"

"You know how worldly I am, Crowley. Why would you think I'd be so ignorant about some of the most arrogant beings out there?" Gabriel grins. "And you also know that I'm not suicidal enough to interfere. I just want to go and see, that's all."

"No," Crowley says. "You're plenty suicidal enough to get involved. And I'd be stupid if I thought I could give you the information and get away with it."

Crowley shuts the door in his face.

Gabriel eyes it, and sighs. Not that he *needed* to ask for the information, as he knew where Sam Winchester was already, and there was no way he could *not* know where Lucifer was.

"I'm not gonna go see him," Gabriel mutters to himself, and he knows he's lying to himself, but when he snaps his fingers he has enough resolve to put it off for later.

Instead, he vanishes to watch the Winchesters.

--

Lucifer finds it...easy to use dreams instead of speaking to his vessel directly. Not that this vessel is *his* vessel, but he wants a body that he can touch Sam Winchester with before he coaxes consent out of him.

No, Nick is just a stand-in before Lucifer can settle into the vessel that was made for him, but even stand-ins need to give him consent. Lucifer slips into the man's dreams and tries to understand him before he appears to him.

Lucifer bypasses the surface details. He knows the man's name: Nick. He knows what happened: Nick lost his child and wife to the violence of another human.

No, what he wants to know is why Nick would agree to let Lucifer use him, and he wants to know if Nick would stand aside and let Lucifer destroy humanity and fight angels in his skin.

Lucifer already knows that he will not lie to this man. He has seen the human tendency to assume that he, as a figure of mythology, lies to all to gain what he wants, but Lucifer learned long ago that there was no true use in lies.

Not when the truth worked so much more effectively.

The form he takes to speak with Nick in this dream is that of Nick's wife. It will help remind Nick of his anger, and it will encourage him to listen, even when Nick knows who Lucifer truly is.

"Nick." Lucifer speaks, and watches his vessel jolt out of one layer of the dream. "Nick. You're dreaming, Nick." He can't help but repeat Nick's name. It's short, it's

who he is lowering himself to attempt to understand. "You're dreaming, but that doesn't mean that this isn't real."

"Sarah?" Nick says, and he looks so tired, so pained.

"I'm not your wife, Nick." Lucifer watches him, trying to see the anger that must be there. "I'm an angel."

"An angel?"

"My name is Lucifer." There's no point in lying, after all, and even so Lucifer watches Nick's lips twist, and he realizes that Nick doesn't believe him.

"Sure. Naturally." Lucifer realizes that Nick doesn't believe that this is real. "Could you do me a favor there, Satan, and remind me to quit drinking before I go to bed?"

It's just another name, even if it stings. Nick can't possibly understand what Lucifer is, not without experiencing it first hand. Lucifer wants to stop and explain that he's not the font of all evil in this world, but then again he will not lie: even if he is not that font, he was used as such in Heaven, on the angels.

Lucifer forges on, reminding himself of why he is here and speaking to this human. "I'm here because you're special, Nick. There's very, very few people like you."

There are very few people indeed who could be the vessel for one of the four named archangels. There are only four people who could contain their angels without limiting them and still surviving their use, and there are less than ten people who could contain an archangel without turning instantly to ash and blood.

Nick, by virtue of his unlucky fate, is one of those few people.

"Is that so?" And Lucifer has never heard a more dubious tone in his life. It's understandable, however.

"You're a vessel. A very powerful vessel." And Nick, while he may not know it, is powerful: to be a vessel requires a certain strength of character, and other things besides, and Lucifer has spent time thinking about vessels - enough time to know what he is saying.

Lucifer watches as Nick sits properly on the bed, feet on the floor, and Lucifer drifts over to stand by the window, but he never ever takes his eyes off of Nick.

"Meaning what, exactly?"

And Lucifer is honest: "I need to take control of your mind and body. To be honest, it'll probably be unpleasant for you. But it is necessary." Lucifer looks at this human, and something about the sight before him compels him to add one more

sentence. "I need you, and you alone."

"Why does it have to be me?" Nick asks, and this is where Lucifer leaves the window to sit next to him.

"I told you: you are special. There are very few vessels like you, and I am afraid that the rest has been spoken for by my brothers. The only other vessel I could use isn't ready for this, Nick."

"Oh, and I am?"

"Yes. I need you to invite me in."

Nick shook his head and looked at Lucifer. "I'd like to wake up now."

"I told you. This is real." Lucifer leaned in close. "You need to invite me in, Nick."

"Even if it is - which it's not, but assuming it was...why the hell would I do something like that?" Nick looks at Lucifer, then away, and Lucifer knows what he needs to do for Nick.

An explanation is in order, it seems.

"You people misunderstand me." Lucifer begins, and he knows how badly his history has been conveyed to humanity. "You call me 'Satan' and 'Devil', but...do you know my crime?"

Lucifer has to stop. He can't tell Nick everything. He can't explain that he was given the task of driving his family apart. He can't explain his anger, his furious anger when he was given his ultimatum from his Father, who he loved - and still does, in a distant way - a long, long time ago.

He summarizes for Nick, in lieu of reliving it all again through words.

"I loved God too much, Nick. And for that, he betrayed me." Unspoken: saddled me with a growing darkness in myself and a pride that could not allow him to bend and bow to humans, who were to be held above God. "He punished me." Unspoken: consigned me to eons in the cold, until I cannot remove the chill from my bones even in warmth. "Just as he's punished you. After all, how could God stand idly by while that man broke into your home and butchered your family in their beds?"

And there: *there* is the anger that Lucifer has been waiting for. The tensing of his shoulders, the way Nick avoids looking at Lucifer.

Lucifer watches him as he finishes twisting the screws, delivering the truth that hurts him even as he says it. He can remember that moment when he saw that vast darkness in God's visage, and it is all he is thinking of as he speaks. "There are only two rational answers, Nick. Either he's sadistic, or he just doesn't care."

Nick swallows, and still doesn't look at Lucifer, but Lucifer doesn't need to meet his eyes to know what he is feeling.

"You're angry. You have every right to be angry." For he created you weak and imperfect and with a dire fate resting on your shoulders, Lucifer thinks, but it is the truth. "I am angry, too." For he was made proud and powerful and yet saddled with the role of becoming known as the Devil, even as he loves - loved - his Father. "I want to right what he made wrong, Nick, that's all."

And then he is silent, for it all rests in Nick's hands, now. It is his decision, and Lucifer cannot force his hand.

It takes several minutes, long minutes of silence as Nick thinks and remembers and then, then:

"If I help you...can you bring back my family?"

It breaks Lucifer's heart, it truly does, for he cannot grant this request. "I'm sorry." He means it. "I can't." But there is something he can offer in its place: "I can give you the next best thing. I can give you justice. Peace."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Because, contrary to popular belief, I don't lie. I don't need to." Nick looks at him, then, and then away once again. "What I need is you, Nick. I need you to say yes."

Nick looks at him once again, and then it is as easy as Nick finally saying "Then, yes" as quietly as he does.

And the dream breaks into reality as Lucifer pours himself into Nick, and it is over.

Lucifer wakes Nick up in his mind only once intentionally:

"Watch," Lucifer whispers, and the man who slew Nick's family in cold blood can only run and scream as Hellhounds wreathed in fire chase him down.

Nick whispers back thoughts that he didn't want *this*, and Lucifer shakes his head.

"You wanted it, Nick," Lucifer says. "I know you. I know your heart. Trust me, you wanted this man to suffer, to pay for what he did, and he will. I promise you, he will."

Nick tries to deny it, but his thoughts aren't strong, and he knows that he is lying to both himself and Lucifer.

Lucifer says nothing more and sends him back to the oblivion of sleep.

Temptation strikes too hard and too fast at some point between Gabriel realizing that the angel following the Winchesters around was *Castiel*, that footsoldier who flew fast patrols, and between Gabriel feeling the power that was Lucifer settle into a vessel.

Gabriel can't help it. He can't even attempt to draw his disguise of being a Trickster closer around him, because he *knows* that any of his closest brothers would see right through it.

Lucifer is standing in an empty apartment when Gabriel appears at the far end of the room.

There's a moment of silence as Lucifer turns to face him, and then there is a name that Gabriel hasn't heard in so, so long: "Gabriel."

Gabriel's disguise demands that he answers that with flippancy. Who Gabriel is now demands that he shrug it off and run.

But it's *Lucifer*.

"You look...different." Gabriel says instead of running and instead of making light of it. "Lucifer."

"So do you." Lucifer looks at Gabriel, studying him, and then he shakes his head. "You don't want to be involved, do you?"

"I - " Gabriel can't lie, can't skirt around the truth here. "I can't watch our family fight. I can't fight you."

"So you ran." Lucifer's tone is cold, and Gabriel can't tell if it's a side effect of how cold his Grace is now, or if it's something else entirely. It hurts regardlessly.

"I can't stop this," Gabriel says, and he's asking for something, something that Lucifer can't give.

"None of us can," Lucifer says softly, and there's regret in his words. "I would have spent more time with you, Gabriel." He walks over to the window, resting fingers on the glass.

Gabriel can't answer that. He mutely joins Lucifer by the window and touches the glass as well, shivering at how cold it is.

"Gabriel," Lucifer says again, and Gabriel shivers from an entirely different reason. "There is something you can do instead of run, or fight." He rests a hand on Gabriel's shoulder, lightly, just touching. "The sooner our vessels agree to say yes, the sooner all of this is over. There won't be any more pain, then."

"...it's going to get worse before it gets better, isn't it?" Gabriel says quietly, but he's already trying to figure out how to approach the Winchesters.

"Yes. I'm sorry, Gabriel." Lucifer truly is sorry, and when he tips Gabriel's face towards him so he can kiss him, Gabriel doesn't pull away, even when Lucifer's lips are like ice.

Lucifer leaves him then, leaves him behind to go and do more of what he must do. Gabriel rests his forehead against the window for a long time, eyes closed, hands clenched into fists.

Merihim, that Fallen from so long ago who went out of Hell at Lucifer's order: he returns, and he has something for Lucifer.

Merihim holds out rings and vials with a strange liquid in them out with a taloned hand, and he bows low before Lucifer.

"With these you can control them, Lord. As was foretold."

"The Horsemen," Lucifer says to him, and Merihim dips his head in assent. "You have exceeded my expectations tenfold, Merihim."

"For you, Lord." Merihim says, voice murky and fading. His form is twisted and barely recognizable as who and what he once was, but he is still loyal. It was how he survived and remembered to return once he had obtained something of value.

Merihim rises from his bow once Lucifer takes the treasures, but keeps his head bent low. "May I return to the fires?"

"Yes," Lucifer says, and he masks his pity well. "I may call upon you again," He says. "I may not."

Merihim raises his head then and his eyes are milky white and strange. Lucifer says nothing more as Merihim spreads his skeleton-and-membraned wings and flies, returning to the regions of Hell with the warmest fires.

Lucifer examines the rings and thinks that he will not trouble Merihim with anything, not after this bounty, not after what cost Merihim paid to retrieve it.

It doesn't make Gabriel feel better, but it gives him something to do. He leaves an obvious trail of murders that the Winchesters will link to him without much effort at all, and he waits. Waits and watches and prepares to draw the vessels in.

It's easy to slip back into his role of the Trickster, and easier still to have a laugh at their expense. Dr. Sexy, Japanese game shows, commercials - he has fun, letting them figure out what he's trying to tell them indirectly.

Gabriel takes care of Castiel's appearance personally.

The fluttering of wings, and then Castiel is there, and Gabriel lets him try to get Dean and Sam out before he yanks Castiel into a different layer of the illusion.

Gabriel's standing in a featureless plain that stretches for miles in all directions when Castiel flickers into view.

"Castiel," He says, and he watches as Castiel turns to face him, tense in every line of his body. He remembers the night he left, and no, no he doesn't regret it. Castiel needed to learn that things that were said to be wrong could feel good, after all.

"Gabriel," Castiel says, and Gabriel grins at him.

"That's me, bro." Gabriel rocks on his feet and gives Castiel a little wave. "How have the years treated you?"

"Let them go," Castiel says, and Gabriel laughs. He comes over to Castiel, watches how Castiel tenses up even more, and rests a hand on Castiel's cheek. It's strange, reaching up to touch Castiel, but it doesn't matter. Castiel's tense and wary either way, but Gabriel's not surprised by that.

"You've spent all this time on Earth, Castiel," Gabriel murmurs. "How have you outlived Uriel?"

"I don't know," Castiel says, and Gabriel shakes his head.

"Something about you is important, and I can't figure out what it is. I mean, beyond you defying Heaven, refusing to join Lucifer, there's not much else that's special about you."

Gabriel keeps rubbing his thumb over Castiel's cheek, watching how Castiel stays tense. He's all angry and terrified and defiant, all wrapped up in a single being, and Gabriel finds him fascinating.

"You had no right," Castiel whispers.

"To leave? To show you how good flesh could feel? C'mon, Castiel, if I had no right I wouldn't be standing here today." Gabriel shakes his head and puts a hand on the back of Castiel's head, pulling him down for a light kiss.

"No," Castiel whispers, and Gabriel smiles (sadly, barely, lonely perhaps) and lets go.

"I'm not that bad, Castiel," Gabriel says, and it might even be truth. "Not to family. So here, I'll give you a way out of this." It would be more convenient to

destroy Castiel here and now, rid the Winchesters of their ally, but Gabriel...Gabriel can't do that. Even after years and years he can't bear to see his brothers harmed.

"What are you offering?" Castiel asks, after too many minutes of silence.

"Stay out of the way for twenty-four hours, and then deliver Dean Winchester to Michael." Gabriel shrugs. "You'll survive everything, then." He's not expecting Castiel to take the deal, but he's hoping that he will. He doesn't want Castiel to be hurt further.

"No," Castiel says, and Gabriel nods. "I will not betray the Winchesters."

"I figured as much," Gabriel says. "I'll let you out whenever I'm done with the Winchesters, then," and he snaps his fingers.

Gabriel vanishes and the featureless plain flickers into static briefly, and then Castiel is in TV Land.

This is about you being too afraid to stand up to your family.

Gabriel would like very much to punch Dean Winchester in the face. He would very much like to excise the memory of Castiel looking back at him with something like pity in his eyes, and most of all he wants everything to back up several hours so he can start over and do things the *right* way. Without getting angry. Without getting caught in the most basic of traps for angels.

Without having to hear Dean Winchester tell him that line.

But the problem is and is and *is*: he is afraid, he is in pain, and he's been on Earth long enough to learn enough new tricks that he probably could stop the fight altogether.

Hell, he could probably make those Winchesters a spell that would render them useless as vessels but alive.

He's not as strong as Lucifer or Michael is, not in a fair fight, but he's been learning how to fight dirty and he's even wielding the additional power of Loki's being, and -

Gabriel drops his head, ignoring the wet, ignoring how there's still oil on the floor, and trying not to think of how he could stop things. He's scared, he's not helpless and he's guilty as all hell about it.

Gabriel wants to bend and break under it all, but he can't, for he's made of stronger stuff than most angels, at least physically. He can't turn to someone who is higher on the hierarchy and ask for orders, and all he can do is think for himself. It *hurts*.

Gabriel thinks, rather viciously, that he understands now why Castiel's still alive. It's only fitting that a creature with the faith of an angel and the reckless will of a human survive where other, stronger angels would not.

"Wait," Gabriel whispers, lifting his head and pulling himself into focus. "No. Stop."

It's a realization that he doesn't want: Nothing in this universe happens by chance, nothing important. Castiel's still alive, and Heaven wants him dead: that's no easy force to avoid, and Castiel is a rapidly weakening angel, an angel who is becoming more human as time goes on.

And Gabriel...he's seen his Father. He can't claim to understand him, no one can, but Gabriel would not put this past his Father.

Gabriel snaps his fingers, sending himself away from the warehouse, and to somewhere in some city somewhere with good coffee and chocolate so he can peoplewatch.

If he's right, and Gabriel thinks he is, then humanity won't be destroyed or given Paradise, and something else entirely will happen to his brothers.

And if he's right, then Gabriel shouldn't even try to help make the vessels give their consent, because it won't end anything - not the fighting, not the world, nothing.

He gives himself two weeks to try and confirm his idea before he goes and does anything about it.

Confirmation comes on a Thursday, which doesn't surprise Gabriel in the least. It goes something like this:

"G-Gabriel?" Abdiel stutters, and Gabriel grins.

"Took you long enough to get here. Hey, Abdiel. I've got a few questions for you."

Gabriel watches as Abdiel visibly makes himself calm down and get over the shock, straightening his vessel's tie. "I'm Zachariah down here, Gabriel. It was time for a change, I thought."

"Zachariah. Right. Fine. Whatever you want." Gabriel shrugs. It wasn't important, just pure arrogance on Abdi- Zachariah's part.

"What do you want to ask, Gabriel?" Zachariah spreads his hands. "I am at your service."

"Tell me about Castiel, and then explain to me why he's not dead yet."

Gabriel watches as Zachariah searches for words, before finally settling on: "He began to empathize with Dean Winchester too much, so we recalled him to show him where his loyalties were supposed to be."

"It didn't take, I see." Gabriel holds back a comment on exactly what he thinks of the idea of an angel getting strong-armed into loyalty, and crosses his arms instead.

"Dean Winchester convinced him to betray Heaven. Raphael destroyed him in an attempt to retrieve Dean Winchester, but Dean evaded our grasp."

"Destroyed?"

"Castiel was *dead*, Gabriel. Raphael destroyed his vessel and executed him for treason."

"Not a chance it wasn't Castiel who was killed?"

"Not a chance, Gabriel." Zachariah looks at him, openly concerned. "Raphael was just as surprised as I was when he discovered that Castiel was alive. That was unpleasant for Raphael, as I recall: Castiel trapped him in a holy fire ring with the help of Dean Winchester."

"They're surprisingly good at that, I'll have you know," Gabriel says. "But that's besides the point. He was dead, and we can't return any angel to life, and Castiel may be becoming human, but he's not there enough for us to restore him. So that leaves one option."

"He told me as such," Zachariah says, shaking his head. "Is it true, then?"

Gabriel shrugged, looking thoughtful. "I'd say yes, actually. And let me guess: the Metatron's said nothing about any of this."

"...I would think so," Zachariah says. "Michael would be able to better answer that question, however. He has kept it near him recently."

"Then that answers that..." Gabriel hms, looking up with a sigh. "Nothing for it, then. Thanks for the info, Zachariah. Don't tell anyone I was here, or I'll come back and demote you myself." Gabriel gives Zachariah a nasty grin and snaps his fingers, vanishing.

There is a ring of fire, a dark room and Castiel turns slowly, looking for any possible ways he can put a break in the fire. He needs to escape, to get back to the Winchesters and help defend them.

Then there is the sound of wings, and Castiel turns to see the Devil on the other side of the fire.

"Lucifer."

It's a not-entirely-unexpected windfall for Lucifer: he had been hearing intriguing rumors about this Castiel, this little footsoldier who had been unremarkable until he had been the one to raise Dean Winchester from Hell. And then there were the rumors that Castiel had died and been raised, and wasn't *that* interesting.

"So I take it you're here with the Winchesters," Lucifer opens the conversation. It's not a question, he knows exactly who Castiel came here with.

Castiel still surprises him: "I came alone."

"Loyalty," Lucifer says flatly. He's never been lied to before by an angel, and isn't this interesting? "Such a nice quality to see in this day and age. Castiel, right? Castiel. I'm told you came here in an automobile."

He can see Castiel weighing his options, trying to judge at what would be the safest answer. "Yes," Castiel says at last.

"What was that like?"

Castiel doesn't answer immediately, entirely tense and nervous as he stops looking at Lucifer to study the room again. "Um." Such a human sound, Lucifer thinks. "Slow. Confining."

"What a peculiar thing you are." Lucifer shifts forward, no longer leaning against the wall ever-so-slightly. He studies Castiel, this strange creature who is, technically, one of his kin. It is strange; he feels no connection to Castiel.

"What's wrong with your vessel?" Castiel asks, suddenly.

"Yes." Lucifer tilts his head. "Nick is wearing a bit thin, I'm afraid." Nick is barely alive, his body held together through blood and Lucifer's force of will, and his mind kept deep in a sleep so that he cannot feel the strain, the constant push of his body attempting to destroy itself. "He can't contain me forever, so - "

Castiel cuts him off. "You - " He moves closer, too close to the flames and stops before he crosses them. "You are not taking Sam Winchester." A slight pause. "I won't let you."

It would be laughable if Castiel didn't mean it, powerless and trapped that he is inside the fire. But Lucifer can see that he truly does mean it, and that he will fight Lucifer to the last.

"Castiel. I don't understand why you're fighting me, of all the angels." And truly Lucifer doesn't. Castiel should have some sense of survival, some niggling hint of indecision, as he has chosen no side in this conflict, and there are no other real choices.

"You really have to ask?" Castiel says, and no, Lucifer doesn't understand him.

"I rebelled, I was cast out. You rebelled, you were cast out. Almost all of Heaven wants to see me dead, and if they succeed, guess what?" Lucifer can see already that while Castiel is following him, Castiel's choice has already been made. He goes on. "You're their new public enemy number one. We're on the same side, like it or not, so why not just see to your own best interests?" *Why not try to survive this conflict, Castiel?* "Which in this case, just happen to be mine." Lucifer shrugs at that. Nothing he can do about that angle.

"I'll die first." Castiel remains unmoved, unpersuaded. Lucifer truly, truly doesn't understand why he is so stubborn.

"I suppose you will."

There's not much else to say.

Lucifer doesn't die at the hands of a human-made weapon. Lucifer uses Merihim's offering and summons Death.

Castiel escapes with the Winchesters, weaker still but struggling on despite the odds. After all, that pipe didn't have to be there, and that demon didn't have to be there. It was coincidence that they were both there are the right time.

All of this further convinces Gabriel that he's got the right idea, and the problem remains: how does he convince Lucifer that he's right, and then after that to stop and leave his chosen path?

Gabriel, much as he'd like to say that he's got this in the bag, doesn't know if he'll succeed. It's not likely. But he must try, and this time he must succeed. Succeed or die trying, and hey, if Castiel can go against the odds and come up alive, then Gabriel can try for the same thing, can't he?

(And even if he fails, it will mean his death, and if he dies then it will be over for him, and he can't say that he would complain about that.)

Castiel can be found almost anywhere looking for God these days, and when Gabriel decides to have a face to face conversation with the rogue angel, he goes through a lot of rumors and angel sightings before he finally corners Castiel in an old Episcopal church located somewhere in Missouri.

"It's not the strangest place to be looking for God," Gabriel says when he arrives, leaning against a pew, "but I can tell you right now that he's not here."

Castiel turns away from the doors to the narthex and faces Gabriel. He's tense once again, but Gabriel was expecting that, and raises his hands, palms out. Even

with none of the lights on, and even with Castiel lacking as much Grace as he does, Gabriel knows that Castiel can see him just fine.

"I'm not here to hurt you, Castiel. I just want to talk." Castiel frowns, and Gabriel doesn't lower his hands. "Honest, Castiel."

"You are not trustworthy, Gabriel."

Gabriel sighs, but he gets it. Castiel's survived this long by being wary, especially around angels, after all. "Then I'll skip ahead and tell you why I came and found you." He drops his hands and puts them in his pockets. "I'm reasonably certain that something's going to go wrong with Michael and Lucifer's fight, and that Earth and humanity will survive whatever happens."

"How? How do you know this?"

"I don't," Gabriel shrugs, rocking on his heels again. "I'm guessing, but I'm willing to bet a lot that it's true. You're alive, after all." He tosses that last sentence off almost as an afterthought, but he has Castiel's attention for reasons other than wariness now.

"Do you know who brought me back?"

"Yup."

"Tell me."

"Say please," Gabriel grins, but goes on. "It was God. Has to be. No angel can restore the life an another angel, and if some pagan god did it, I'd be able to tell. That and they're staying out of this for the most part."

Castiel's shoulders slumps, and for a moment Gabriel reads relief all over him, before he regains his wariness and asks another question. "Do you...know why God did such a thing?"

"Who am I to tell you what Dad's motives are?" Gabriel shakes his head. "I can guess at what your revival means, though. Think about it: if an angel gets cut off from Heaven, he doesn't lose his Grace or become human. We're not built out of the right stuff to simply...become human if we lose our Grace. I don't know what you were taught in angelic biology class, but if we get cut off from Heaven, that means we can't go back there without expecting a lot of resistance at the border. We *don't* turn human."

"Anna did," Castiel says, and it takes Gabriel a moment to remember who and what she was. Castiel answers the question for him regardlessly: "Arariel."

"Oh, her!" Gabriel moves around to sit on the arm of the pew, perching on that impossible seat. "And exactly *how* many rituals did she know? I bet a hundred bucks that she pulled a reincarnation kind of thing. But that's besides the point. Unimportant to this conversation!"

"I am becoming human," Castiel tells him quietly. "And I am cut off from Heaven. No other explanation seems likely."

"Let me finish, Castiel, alright?" Gabriel resists the urge to make diagrams, and instead hops up again, moving closer. "The point is, angels don't turn human without some kind of special circumstances, and you're not qualifying as a standard special circumstance."

"Gabriel," Castiel says, and he is interrupting *again*. Gabriel eyes him and considers the merits of duct-tape again, but lets Castiel finish. "I do not believe that is correct use of - "

Gabriel snaps his fingers, and there is duct-tape.

"As I was saying," Gabriel beams at him, "You're not the average special butterfly. You're a super special butterfly. I would bet another hundred bucks that Dad brought you back with a catch like this, and that's why I'm convinced that things are gonna go south for Heaven *and* Hell."

He snaps his fingers and the duct-tape vanishes again, leaving Castiel to touch his lips for a moment before returning his attentions to Gabriel.

"I do not understand."

"I'm done explaining, though. You're not the one I have to convince about this." Gabriel chuckles lightly, thinking of what's coming up next. "Ask Dean about it, alright?"

And before Castiel can speak, or somehow get more answers out of him, Gabriel snaps his fingers and vanishes.

That was the dry run, Gabriel thinks. The hard part starts now.

Gabriel finally works up the nerve to go and speak to Lucifer several days later, after taking the time to sample some truly excellent chocolates and delicacies from across the world. (What? He may never get the chance to enjoy these delights again, after all!)

He flies, and lets the bright beacon that is Lucifer's Grace guide him, instead of finding rumors and doing things to mundane way. Gabriel can't say if all angels can follow that beacon, or if it's just because of who Gabriel is, but either way he lands next to Lucifer, and this time he arrives with the sound of wings.

Gabriel can't name the location, but it's old ruins of human make covered with greenery, and it's...strange to see Lucifer standing on earth like that. If Gabriel didn't know better, he would think that Lucifer was just human. It's disturbing, and Gabriel can't say he likes it.

"Has something changed?" Lucifer says by way of greeting, turning back around. Gabriel can see how his vessel is breaking down under the strain, and he can see how Lucifer himself is weary.

"Yup," Gabriel says, and walks over. "You look awful."

Instantly the weariness is gone, and Lucifer is cold, stoic once again. "It's getting closer to the appointed time."

"I don't want you to be there when the time comes." Gabriel says it straight, and hopes that what he has is convincing enough.

Lucifer gives him a long look, frowning, and Gabriel has the feeling that if he were anyone else, he would be ignored or flat out destroyed for his impudence. "Explain why you think so," Lucifer says instead, and Gabriel takes a deep breath.

"Castiel died minutes before you were freed. Raphael slew him for treason."

"Treason." Lucifer repeated, but he was already following Gabriel's line of thought. "He was brought back."

"Nothing pagan did it." Gabriel watches him, hoping that Lucifer would come to the same conclusion that he had.

"Father did it, then," Lucifer says, and then: "Castiel is becoming more human every single time he uses up more of his Grace."

Then he is silent, and Gabriel takes the moment to reach out and touch the tree roots that have grown down through what used to be a building. It's an...interesting place for Lucifer to be, he thinks.

"I'm not here to defend humanity, you know," Gabriel comments when the silence stretches. "Sure, they're neat and everything, but they aren't worth dying for."

"You want me to stop."

"I don't want you to fight Michael, or get yourself hurt, and if you don't stop, that's what's going to happen, Lucifer!" Gabriel pulls his hand back from the tree roots and turns back to Lucifer, facing him. "I don't want to lose another brother!"

"It's going to happen, Gabriel," Lucifer tells him. "Whether we want it or not."

"No, it's won't!" Gabriel's as sure of this as he can be. "Castiel's sided with the Winchesters, and he's the one who was brought back! *Not* Uriel, and none of the other angels who have died since then! Even the human designated as the prophet's been getting things wrong! This fight isn't set in stone, Lucifer!" Gabriel's desperate, sure of what he believes, and he wants Lucifer to understand what he's saying, and most of all he wants Lucifer to stop bending to what they

all believed to be fate.

"The only being who can put information into our minds like that is God, Gabriel. Are you trying to tell me that he's wrong?" Lucifer's frowning, listening, getting it but he's not changing his mind, and that leads Gabriel to burst out with what would be called blasphemy in Heaven.

"I'm trying to tell you that he's lying to us!" Gabriel gives him a look, hiding surprise at himself, but it *fits*. "Would you put that past Father? After he made these humans in *his* image? After he wanted us to bow to *their* wills?"

"I - " Lucifer begins, but Gabriel goes on.

"Think about it! No one's heard from him in centuries, and then the first thing he does during this Apocalypse is bring back an angel protecting the humans! Wouldn't it be fitting that somehow something goes wrong during the fight and you *both* lose? So that neither side could change the Earth?" Gabriel stops, then, but doesn't take his eyes off of Lucifer. He's *right*, he's right, somehow he knows that it's going to play out like what he's describing, and if there has ever been a message that he needs to get across to anyone successfully, this is it.

"...I would not be surprised if that were the game our Father were playing with us, Gabriel," Lucifer says quietly, clearly. "But I rebelled against him once, and I have suffered greatly for it. I cannot change my path."

Gabriel stiffens in mute shock, and Lucifer gives him a saddened look.

"I cannot change this, Gabriel, and neither can you." Lucifer raises his hand, almost reaching out to touch Gabriel, then drops his hand and turns away, walking away from Gabriel.

Gabriel closes his eyes for a second, taking in another deep breath, thinks not of Castiel but of Sam Winchester, telling him that he can't live without his brother, and so he opens his eyes. He moves without thinking, then, and drags Lucifer back around and into a desperate kiss. He sees Lucifer's eyes widen, and he breaks the kiss for a moment.

"If you do this," Gabriel tells him, anger rising in his words, "I lose you. I can't - not again." And then Gabriel kisses him again, hard and biting at his lips, and when Lucifer raises his hands and gently pushes him back, Gabriel *glares* at him.

He doesn't hide his fury, and he doesn't hide his hurt. Something somewhere in Lucifer doesn't soften so much as snap, and then Lucifer is fisting his hands in Gabriel's jacket and dragging him closer.

They kiss, then, and this time Lucifer kisses *back*. When Gabriel opens his mouth to moan, cold air floods his mouth as Lucifer shares breath with him.

Gabriel doesn't pull away - can't pull away now, even if he wanted to, and even as Lucifer is freezing to the touch he tugs at Lucifer's clothing, pulling gently as a

warning before he rips the clothing off of Lucifer.

"Go ahead," Lucifer urges, voice deeper than usual, and Gabriel pulls Lucifer's shirt off in a short, strong gesture. He flicks away the shreds of fabric that haven't fallen away yet, then splays his hands on Lucifer's chest. Lucifer's skin is icy to the touch, and Gabriel breathes in, focusing his Grace and warming himself so that he is nearly burning to the touch. It helps offset the chill that Lucifer exudes, and for a moment they look at each other, pausing in everything simply to look.

Gabriel feels like he's on fire when he hugs Lucifer then, wraps himself around frozen flesh and kisses a chilly shoulder.

Lucifer rests a hand on the back of Gabriel's jacket, then takes a handful of it in his hand. It's the same question Gabriel was asking, but Gabriel likes this jacket. He snaps his fingers and he is suddenly naked, leaning into Lucifer.

"We might need a bed," Gabriel murmurs, and Lucifer's chuckle is a low rumble. He twists his hand, and they are elsewhere, in some hotel room somewhere with a large, clean and comfortable bed. Gabriel laughs, and shoves Lucifer into it before draping himself over Lucifer and kissing him again.

Lucifer puts his hands on Gabriel's hips and rubs his thumbs over Gabriel's skin, quiet as he focuses on feeling.

"I'm going to warm you up," Gabriel says, half-threatening, half-promising, and he curls a too-hot hand around Lucifer's cock, resting another too-hot hand on Lucifer's chest. Lucifer jerks up, grip on Gabriel's hips tightening, and Gabriel laughs as he hardens in his hand. "Good? You like that?"

"You talk too much," Lucifer growls before breaking into a groan, and then he is thrusting up into Gabriel's hand with another cry.

Gabriel moves back, stroking Lucifer firmly as he lifts his other hand from Lucifer's chest and begins to pump himself, shuddering at the heat of it. "I'm going to be in you this time," he promises.

"Gabriel!" Lucifer can't help the next thrust into Gabriel's hand, not when he is thinking of that heat inside of him, staving off the chill in some way.

Gabriel grins at him and pushes Lucifer's legs apart and up, bothering with enough abuse of power to slick himself up, and then he is placing his tip at Lucifer's entrance. For a moment he pauses there, one hand still wrapped around Lucifer's cock, and for a moment he watches Lucifer tremble (involuntary human reaction, as not an angel on Earth in a vessel can hold back those tremors, not when they're like this) before thrusting in. It burns, it's wonderful, and Gabriel tips his head back with a shout as he's entirely in Lucifer.

Gabriel holds them there, hands now on Lucifer's hips as he savors how Lucifer is tight around him, and at how he can *feel* Lucifer's Grace cold against his.

When he looks at Lucifer again, Lucifer's eyes are open, looking as he hangs onto Gabriel's arms, shaking at the sheer heat of it. "Gabriel," Lucifer says, and "Gabriel, *move*, don't hold still - " and Gabriel thrusts forward, pulls out slightly and thrusts in again, moaning as he moves, making Lucifer bite back a sob at the pleasure of it. He's been alone and denied all contact for years and eons and forever, and here is Gabriel who is too-hot and holding onto him and looking at him with the same awe and want that Lucifer remembers from a distant past.

Gabriel shudders and lets go of Lucifer's hip with one hand before reaching up to caress Lucifer's cheek, smiling at him. There's not a trace of smirk or mockery in him, and Lucifer raises a hand to touch Gabriel's hand, tilting his face into the touch.

Then Lucifer rolls his hips forward, a sudden movement that catches Gabriel off-guard, and Gabriel comes with a shout, eyes closing and head tilting back as he clings to Lucifer, holding onto Lucifer as an anchor. The warmth spreads in Lucifer, even as Gabriel begins to pull out, and Lucifer follows Gabriel over the edge, coming with a shout that has Voice in it, and if the glass in the windows crack and break, they can fix it later.

Gabriel drapes himself over Lucifer, tangling fingers in Lucifer's hair and fingers, and he doesn't snap as he cleans them up and brings a blanket into existence. He doesn't need to.

Lucifer tips Gabriel's face towards him, and kisses him, gentle. His eyes are bright as he whispers: "How angry will Michael be when I'm not there?"

Gabriel's relieved laugh is all Lucifer needs to see to know that he's made the right choice.